

line of sound principle by which we could measure our deviation from the norm. But there came a time when we acquiesced in deviations from the norm and cast about for a political principle to justify them. When we took this tack, such a principle was easy to find because it was enshrined in the Declaration itself, as a technique, along with the natural rights philosophy. It was the consent of the governed idea.

Consent of the Governed

The "consent of the governed" idea is an implementing principle, not a primary one. Deriving the just powers of a government "from the consent of the governed," as the Declaration does, is a natural means of implementing the "self-evident" truths "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." This is the primary principle, the axiom about rights. But when these truths are no longer self-evident, when the belief in God-given rights dies out, leaving "consent of the governed" as the sole political expedient, the road ahead leads to tyranny. The tyranny will not conform to the pattern of a divine right monarchy or an enlightened despotism which

needs a different sanctioning principle; it will be a democratic tyranny.

"Consent of the governed" introduces the majoritarian principle into politics. However useful this may be as a device for choosing personnel, it is vicious when it expands into the delusion that the majority has competence in the realms of faith and morals, and has therefore a right to rule unrestrained except by prudential and expedient considerations. This delusion is crassly put by a University of Chicago political scientist: "For in a democracy right is what the majority makes it to be." Consent of the governed, without the restraining influence exerted by the belief in God-given rights, which disappeared as religion lost its hold on the modern mind, has led logically, directly, and implacably to totalitarianism and the so-called People's Democracies.

A Democratic Despotism

Democratic despotism is the inevitable consequence of the "consent of the governed" idea — unless it be accompanied by a virile doctrine of rights which derives them from a source beyond society. From the classical world to the time of our Declaration of Independence, this source was God. But about the time the God concept found a meaningful polit-

ical expression in the Declaration, the concept itself lost its hold on the minds of men. The relationship between the explicitly articulated concept of equal rights in the Declaration and the God concept was that of effect and cause. When a cause ceases to operate, trace effects or an after-image may persist for a time; and in the modern world the idea of inherent rights moved men even after they had cut themselves adrift from its religious moorings. The eighteenth century denatured God and deified Nature; the nineteenth century mechanized Nature, and the twentieth century depersonalized man. If the universe and man correspond to such a picture, there is no place in it for anything resembling the traditional doctrine of rights.

Traditions of Civility

The poet, Coventry Patmore, observed that we are the inheritors of

The fair sum of six thousand years
Traditions of civility.

In the course of this long human experience of living together under relatively stable conditions there gradually evolved an awareness that man is more than a thing, that there is a dignity and grandeur in the human soul because it is a portion of the divine in man, coterminous with that as-

pect of the divine interpreted as the moral order or the Natural Law. To the extent that such beliefs took hold of ancient peoples they attempted to base their political structures on the explicit consent of those involved — "those involved" numbering less than the total population which included slaves and unassimilated foreigners. Conquest and subjugation do not supply a principle of rule; rule is always based on some degree of implicit consent. Consent, in a republic, is deliberately courted. Such was the case in the Hebrew commonwealth, in the Greek city-states, and in the Roman republic. It is even more true of Christendom which fell heir to these three strands of tradition. Christian doctrine, writes Wilhelm Roepke, "starts from man as an individual endowed with an immortal soul striving for its salvation. Before the State there is now the Person, whereas above the State there is God, His love and His justice common to all men."

The Divine Nature of Things

Judging by the record of history, man seems to have a natural tendency to seek a cosmic foundation for his social way of life; no culture of record has been wholly secular. Men posit a divine order of reality transcending the natural world which meets the senses.